

**Children's Bureau  
Child and Family Services Review  
Key Findings Report  
Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services System  
Child and Family Services Division**

The Children's Bureau and the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) administer the child and family services reviews. The reviews comprise two phases: (1) the Statewide Assessment, during which the State analyzes its child welfare data and practice, and (2) the onsite review, during which Federal and State teams examine outcomes for children and families by conducting case record reviews and case-related interviews, and assess State systemic issues through stakeholder interviews.

Following the onsite review, Federal staff prepare a Final Report, which is provided to the State within 30 days following the onsite review or resolution of a discrepancy. States are provided a courtesy copy of the Final Report before the official Final Report is issued. In order for the State to be found in substantial conformity in any one of the seven outcomes reviewed, the outcome must be determined to be substantially achieved in 95 percent (90 percent during the first review) of the cases reviewed. States that are found not to be in conformity on any of the seven outcomes or seven systemic factors must prepare a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) that includes action steps and benchmarks for bringing the State into conformity. The PIP is due not more than 90 days after the State receives the courtesy copy of the Final Report. This report presents key findings from the Montana Final Report of the review.

**I. Identifying Information and Review Dates**

**ACF Region:** VIII

**Date of Onsite Review:** August 19–23, 2002

**Period Under Review:** April 1, 2002–August 19, 2002

**Date Final Report Issued:** January 14, 2003

**Date Program Improvement Plan Due:** April 14, 2003

**Date Program Improvement Plan Approved:** January 16, 2004

**Estimated Penalty:** \$3,386,993

**II. Highlights of Findings**

- A. The State met the national standards for three of the six standards.
- B. The State achieved substantial conformity for one of the seven outcomes.
- C. The State achieved substantial conformity for five of the seven systemic factors.

<b>III. State's Conformance With the National Standards:</b>				
<b>Data Indicator</b>	<b>National Standard (Percentage)</b>	<b>State's Percentage</b>	<b>Meets Standard</b>	<b>Does Not Meet Standard</b>
Repeat Maltreatment	6.1 or less	13.1		X
Maltreatment of Children in Foster Care	.57 or less	.19	X	
Foster Care Re-Entries	8.6 or less	20.2		X
Length of Time To Achieve Reunification	76.2 or more	87	X	
Length of Time To Achieve Adoption	32 or more	42.2	X	
Stability of Foster Care Placements	86.7 or more	80.8		X
<b>IV. State's Conformance With the Outcomes:</b>				
<b>Outcome</b>		<b>Achieved Substantial Conformity</b>	<b>Did Not Achieve Substantial Conformity</b>	
Safety Outcome 1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.			X	
Safety Outcome 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.			X	
Permanency Outcome 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.			X	
Permanency Outcome 2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.			X	
Well-Being Outcome 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.			X	
Well-Being Outcome 2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.		X		
Well-Being Outcome 3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.			X	

<b>V. State's Conformance With the Systemic Factors</b>		
<b>Systemic Factor</b>	<b>Achieved Substantial Conformity</b>	<b>Did Not Achieve Conformity</b>
Statewide Information System	X	
Case Review System		X
Quality Assurance System		X
Training	X	
Service Array	X	
Agency Responsiveness to the Community	X	
Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention	X	
<b>VI. Key Findings by Outcome and Systemic Factor<sup>1</sup></b>		
<p><b>A. The review noted the following strengths regarding the outcomes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making diligent efforts to maintain children safely in their homes</li> <li>• Placing children in close proximity to their biological families and with their siblings, when appropriate</li> <li>• Preserving children's connections to their family, faith, community, culture, and friends</li> <li>• Meeting the educational needs of children</li> </ul> <p><b>B. The review noted the following concerns regarding the outcomes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not investigating reports of child maltreatment in a timely manner</li> <li>• Not preventing repeat maltreatment of children</li> <li>• Not making sufficient efforts to reduce the risk of harm to children</li> <li>• Not preventing children from re-entering foster care within 12 months of a previous discharge</li> <li>• Not providing stable placements for children in foster care</li> <li>• Not establishing appropriate permanency goals for children in a timely manner</li> </ul>		

<sup>1</sup> Visit the Children's Bureau Web site at <[www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/cwrp/tools/sumfinding.doc](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/cwrp/tools/sumfinding.doc)> for more detailed information about the child and family services reviews outcomes and systemic factors.

## **VI. Key Findings by Outcome and Systemic Factor (Continued)**

- Not making efforts to achieve permanency for children through reunification, permanent placement with relatives, or guardianship
- Not making diligent efforts to achieve adoption for children in a timely manner
- Not making efforts to assist children in attaining the permanency goal of emancipation
- Not facilitating visitation of children in foster care with their parents and siblings
- Not making diligent efforts to locate and assess relatives as potential placement resources for children
- Not making efforts to support the parent-child relationship of children in foster care
- Not assessing the needs of, nor providing services to, parents, foster parents, and children
- Not involving parents and children in case planning
- Not visiting with children and parents frequently enough to monitor and promote the safety and well-being of children
- Not meeting the physical, dental, or mental health needs of children

### **C. The review noted the following strengths with regard to the systemic factors:**

- Statewide Information System
  - The statewide automated information system can determine the status, demographics, location, and goals for all children in foster care.
- Case Review System
  - Termination of parental rights proceedings occur within the timeframes specified in the Adoption and Safe Families Act.
  - Foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caretakers of children in foster care are routinely notified of and given an opportunity to participate in hearings for children.
- Training
  - The state operates a staff development and training program.

## VI. Key Findings by Outcome and Systemic Factor (Continued)

- The state provides ongoing training addressing the skills and knowledge needed for staff to perform their duties.
- The State provides training addressing the skills and knowledge needed for current and prospective foster and adoptive parents and staff of State-licensed facilities that care for children in foster care to carry out their responsibilities.
- Service Array
  - The State offers an array of services to meet the needs of children and families.
  - Services offered are individualized to the unique needs of children and families.
- Agency Responsiveness to the Community
  - The State engages in ongoing consultation with consumers, service providers, courts, and other stakeholders.
  - The State jointly develops with its stakeholders annual reports of progress.
  - The State's services are coordinated with services or benefits of other Federal programs serving the same population.
- Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention
  - The State has implemented standards for foster family and adoptive homes and child care institutions.
  - State standards for foster and adoptive family homes are applied uniformly.
  - The State conducts criminal clearances for foster care and adoptive families and operates a case planning process that includes provisions for ensuring children's safety.
  - The State diligently recruits foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of the children for whom homes are needed.
  - The State uses cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for children.

### **D. The review noted the following concerns regarding the systemic factors:**

- Case Review System
  - Children in foster care do not have written case plans and children and parents are not consistently involved in case planning.

## **VI. Key Findings by Outcome and Systemic Factor (Continued)**

- The status of each child is not reviewed in court at least every 6 months.
- Permanency hearings are not held for children in foster care within 12 months of entry into care.
- Quality Assurance
  - Standards have not been implemented to ensure that children in foster care are provided with quality services to address their needs.
  - The State does not operate an identifiable quality assurance system.
- Service Array
  - Services are not accessible to families and children in all locations of the State.